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THE WORKINGMAN'S HOME AND ITS ARCHITECTURAL PROBLEMS

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A cottage and a garden, home and family as the day's work ends, are the ideal of happiness for many a man, one of the bulwarks of the town and nation, and the ultimate goal of the housing problem.

In America one of the earliest typical houses was the "Cape Cod Cottage," built around a single chimney with one or two sleeping rooms on the ground floor for the benefit of the mother who generally did the cooking as well as cared for the children. A century later on the other side of the continent a similar house has developed known as the California bungalow. This type has spread across the country and now stands side by side with its colonial ancestor on the Atlantic coast. Similar one-story houses are being built to solve the low-rent demand in Germany and Austria. In Budapest a shoemaker stopped the work he was engaged in with the help of his family in his little glazed-in porch, to show me the three living and sleeping rooms all on the first floor and the unfinished second floor or attic in which the family wash was drying. In England similar accommodations are generally provided in two finished stories. It should be noted that all these foreign examples have incombustible outside walls. The portable house capable of extension as the family grows, a development in America of the last three years, will fill, in some localities, the requirements of single-story inexpensive houses.

The cheapest type of single house is the "story-and-a-half" with its chamber walls and plate about 4 feet above the second floor level. From this point the ceiling follows the slope of the roof until the 8-foot horizontal ceiling is reached. Examples of this may be seen in the manufacturing centers, such as Lynn, Mass., or Erie, Pa.

The two-story house with square, level ceilings on the second floor, is but little more expensive, but the tendency is then to raise the roof and finish rooms in the attic which makes the building too expensive for consideration as a type.

For two families, however, this two-story and attic type has certain advantages, and the "two-family house" is a familiar though rarely a beautiful object. Two front doors are customary, one leading directly to the second floor, and under usual building laws, two staircases are required for fire-protection, giving front and back stairs so that the family on the first story has access to one room in the attic, and the second story dweller has his separate cellar and heater as well as a room in the attic, all separate except in the matter of sound. An advantage urged by the builders and sellers of these residences is that a man may own the whole of the house and control it, and pay the running expenses by the rent of the other apartment.

The frame apartment house, for three or more families, particularly the "three-decker," is in disrepute and forbidden by many building laws. If it is semi-fireproof, with brick or fireproof walls, there is not the same objection, provided there is sufficient light and air, and the area between fire-walls is not too great.

Double or multiple houses, where each family controls all the space between earth and heaven within its party or lot lines, give an individuality only equaled by the single family dwellings, and preferable to those that are small and crowded. The family in a block is more isolated from its neighbor than the family in a single house where the windows often look into the next house almost within hand-shaking distance, 6 or 10 feet away.

Many workmen are obliged to occupy houses that have descended from some high estate, and it is difficult to find such houses that have been altered so that the sanitary conditions are tolerable. The problem of alterations is peculiar to cities, and the more careful the original city-planning, the less danger will there be of such change in districts. The purpose should be to keep residence districts of a certain class the same and prevent the turning of the tide of the population which lowers real estate values, as at present. All this is an economic loss that brings the necessity of making alterations, an ever-present architectural problem too often not solved by architects or sanitarians.

The "quadruple" house has been developed in Germany, notably at Leverkusen, and has lately been introduced into the United States. Illustrations of this may be found in the *Architectural Record*, New York, July, 1913. It is a square building consisting of

four houses, one on each corner, each with its separate entrance and yard. Each has three stories, the third being in the roof, and the effect is that of a good-sized single house. Aside from the unfavorable north or northwest exposure that one of the families must have, the arrangement seems to be very practical and economical; it is also good architecturally as it introduces larger units.

In regard to the relationship between attractiveness and cost, we cannot expect beauty from shoddiness. The speculator, the shyster architect or no architect, and the jerry-builder go hand in hand. The builder, brought up on a half century of gingerbread decoration, regards everything in that line as extra expense, and coupled with the customary extra supervision is apt to be timid and to give a high estimate if an architect is employed. The architect too is often disinclined to get down to the simplest details of construction, and even if he works out simple details, finds it difficult to change the custom of builders without causing greater instead of less expense.

Grouping adds to the effectiveness of houses if they are sufficiently near to merge the sky-line. One of the greatest objections to the appearance of our modern towns is their aimless irregularity. The irregular old German towns were picturesque. Take, for example, Rothenburg, Dinkelsbuehl, Buttstedt. But notice that they were not aimless in their arrangement, and in detail they are delightful.

Houses nearly alike and placed in rows, may be attractive, if they are evidently well suited to their purpose, and individually interesting. The houses of this class erected by the London County Council at Norbury, are much more attractive than speculators' rows on adjacent streets.

There is opportunity for economy in the arrangement of the staircase. The "huehner-treppe" or "hen-house steps" in the new Garden City houses at Hellerau, near Dresden, Germany, are excellent examples of stairways that are large enough, though small and steep. There is little satisfaction in a common-place stairway, that is not gradual enough in its ascent to be an easy and ornamental addition to the house, nor steep enough to be economical of space and quick to climb.

In discussing the architectural attractiveness of workingmen's homes, it must not be forgotten that they should be attractive to the people who are to occupy them. When Denry had succeeded

in life and built a house with "all the modern improvements," he was unable to get his mother to live in it, as she preferred the old house on the old street with all its antiquated but familiar inconveniences. It has been found difficult to get people to move from slums to suburbs; there seems to be an appeal in the big busy brick buildings that the country cottage or suburban garden does not satisfy. Indeed there is no accounting for tastes and we must acknowledge that we really do not know what is best for us. There is always the lurking desire to ape one's betters, without acknowledging that they are better, that makes the requirements that we are willing to pay for quite different from our needs. A family must have a parlor, dining-room, sitting-room and kitchen, infinitesimal in size, when a good living-kitchen would be better and cheaper. It is largely a question of popular education as well as of architecture and the line of demarcation is not clear. The problem is not sufficiently definite when it is handed to the architect and he finds fault with requests for three rooms when he feels that one will answer.

Into the servant question we happily do not need to enter, for the workingman's home is also a working woman's home into which the servant does not and should not enter. Now if this situation can be made a matter of pride for the working family and the kitchen made the best room in the house, like the old New England farmhouse kitchen, or the living-room where the cooking is done in the little houses of England and Germany, is not a great cut immediately made in the cost of the house as well as in the cost of living in it?

In Frankfurt I was shown into a sunny living-room; the built-in range, neat and suggestive of home, gave sufficient heat for warmth as well as for cooking the food. It was only a step for the mother to put the food before three children in the dining alcove. It compared favorably with our tiny northwest kitchens and two double-swinging step-delaying doors that our American servantless mothers have to endure. What was a pleasure to the German in the company of her children, is with our American arrangement, drudgery.

As to essentials and non-essentials, where is the line to be drawn? The landlord must let the house, and the house will not let without certain features that are not essential, and there seems to be no grade of poverty so low where a house with certain non-essentials will not be taken in preference to more modern and sanitary accommodations but restricted to simple necessities.

The writer aided and abetted the changing of an old mansion in a degenerating suburb of Boston, into a three-apartment house. The appropriation was limited and it developed in discussion with the real estate agent, that while it was essential to have a "bath-room" in the apartment that the tenant could talk about to her friends, it made no difference whether or not a bath-tub was installed so long as space for it was there. Therefore in the interest of "economy" and "requirements of tenants" the bath-tubs were omitted from the contract and tenants moved in before the contractors were through and out of the house.

Beyond such requirements as a good roof and an outer window in every room, it is possible to state certain essentials:

1. A living-room or living-kitchen in which the most of the family work is done and where the meals are cooked and served.
2. A wash-room or scullery.
3. Three sleeping-rooms, more or less.
4. A toilet or bath-room.
5. A cellar or shed.

If the sleeping-rooms and bath are on the second floor, there will be space enough for a parlor or a porch on the first story and these are generally included even in low-cost houses. If the parlor can be shut off, it can be used as a sleeping-room.

Just what is the "irreducible minimum" for the workman's living-room? Can the combination sink and laundry-tub with wooden cover stand in the room with the gas stove and the dining table, as they do in the Charlesbank homes, Boston? Or shall the sink be placed in a separate wash-room or scullery? If in the living room, is it possible for aspiring workmen's wives to conceal them by a screen—the only "non-imitation furnishing" of the bachelor girl's room?

A novel recently published in Boston, tells the story of how "A middle-class New Englander emigrates to America" and finds "one way out" of his over-burdening clerk's life and suburban house with its false standards, through the simpler life of a four-room flat in the Italian quarter of his own city. By sloughing off an unnecessary style beyond his means, he was able to find the essentials of healthy, happy living, and in the end better though less expensive living conditions than before. What we need is the "intensive cultivation" of houses making it possible for one family to obtain living space where two did before with more favorable conditions and no increase in rental.

The subject of housing is calculated to give anyone a sense of great weariness and visions of dry statistics. What is wanted, in a word, is to give every family a home, and the architect's problem is to give the proper place for that home. The problem is not entirely the architect's; it is to a large extent educational. The demand for simple homes must be created. There must be some restriction in the occupants per room, demanded as much by decency as by the housing law. Too much deference, on the other hand, must not be paid to the demand for many separate rooms, for a parlor, when sleeping rooms are needed and a larger, lighter, airier living-room. Yet in planning group houses it is possible to arrange some houses with parlors in order to keep the younger members of the family in the evenings off of the streets. Under these conditions the parlor may be considered a necessity, but if it becomes merely a rarely used stiff front-room, with the best light in the house, it is a mistake.

In the servantless house how wasteful it is to have to cook too far from the dining table. It is stated that not more than 10 per cent of the families have servants; it would seem that out of the remaining 90 per cent a few would be willing to live in houses designed for families that were willing to acknowledge that they did not have servants and never expected to have them. For such a family the living-room or living-kitchen would immediately become the largest, sunniest, most pleasant room in the house, with a small wash-room near by, where the cooking is done in the living-room and the same range that cooks the food heats the house, or else the small pantry-kitchen can be developed where a gas stove is used, close by the living-room.

The architect's problem for a cottage or for small city flats, is not to take any conventional plan and try to put a pretty exterior around it, but rather to develop a compact, adaptable, economical plan suited to the essential requirements of the average family, and then to express this plan without meaningless ornament in the exterior design. The most attractive small buildings we know of are the English laborers' cottages. These are attractive because they are the simplest possible expression of the workman's needs, small in scale, of permanent materials that grow more and more picturesque with time.

Can we not get a little of this simple but satisfying character into our smaller homes?